



Data Points

RESULTS FROM THE 1997 CALIFORNIA WOMEN’S HEALTH SURVEY

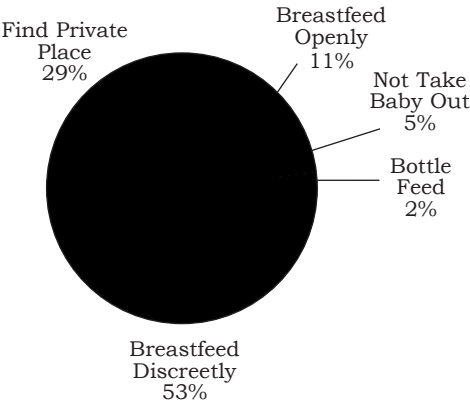
Breastfeeding during the first year of life has been shown to improve health and development of young children. Therefore, the Academy of Pediatrics recommends that mothers breastfeed all infants until their first birthday unless medically contraindicated. In California, fewer than 15% of mothers breastfeed their infants for the child’s entire first year of life. African American and Asian women are less likely than other women to breastfeed their babies (Breastfeeding: Investing in California’s Future, California Breastfeeding Promotion Committee Report to the California Department of Health Services, 1996). Society’s attitudes toward public breastfeeding have been shown to influence the willingness of women to breastfeed their children in public. Therefore, when the California Department of Health Services (DHS) began a multimillion dollar breastfeeding media campaign to reduce barriers to breastfeeding on July 13, 1998, messages were included to increase support for breastfeeding in public. The California Women’s Health Survey (CWHS) provided an opportunity to assess attitudes of California women

about public breastfeeding prior to implementation of the media campaign. The CWHS asked 4,010 women over age 18: **“Please tell me with which of the following statements you agree most. When a breastfeeding woman is out of the house and needs to feed her baby, I think she should: (1) bottle feed at that time, (2) not take the baby out of the house when the baby is breastfeeding, (3) find a private place to breastfeed, (4) breastfeed discreetly without showing any breast, or (5) breastfeed openly even if she needs to show her breast.”** More than half of all women answered that when breastfeeding women are outside of the house, they should breastfeed their baby discreetly. However, a substantial minority of women felt that women should not breastfeed their baby in public, even discreetly. This finding provides baseline data useful for assessing the effectiveness of the DHS WIC Outreach and Breastfeeding promotional campaign in changing women’s attitudes about public breastfeeding.

**ATTITUDES
TOWARD
BREASTFEEDING
IN PUBLIC**

*Women, Infants,
and Children (WIC)
Supplemental
Nutrition Branch
Maternal and Child
Health Branch*

**Opinions About How Breastfeeding Women Should
Feed Their Baby When Out of the House;
California, 1997**



Public Health Message:

While a majority of California women support breastfeeding discreetly, a large number of California women do not support breastfeeding in public. Public health interventions are needed to increase the acceptability of breastfeeding in public among Californians.

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